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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/13/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [OAS](#) [GY](#)
SUBJECT: JAGDEO DETERMINED TO HOLD ELECTIONS ON AUGUST 28

REF: A. GEORGETOWN 663
[1](#)B. GEORGETOWN 594
[1](#)C. GEORGETOWN 462
[1](#)D. GEORGETOWN 371

Classified By: DCM Michael D. Thomas
For Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: President Jagdeo is determined to hold national elections on August 28 -- one to two weeks sooner than expected -- and within the constitutional deadline. The Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) needs to push hard to be ready by then. The pressure is also on donor countries and international organizations to ensure that observer missions will be operational on time. Much of the political opposition will be up in arms when word of a possible August 28 date gets out. They or the courts could still derail the election.

Jagdeo Predicts August 28 Polling Day

[1](#)2. (C) President Jagdeo confidentially told Ambassador during a July 11 meeting that the Election Day will be August 28. This date is one to two weeks sooner than expected given that GECOM decided in April that it could not deliver elections before August 30 (ref D). Jagdeo said August 28 has the following advantages: 1) it is on a Monday, Guyana's traditional voting day; 2) it falls within the (extended) constitutional timeframe; and 3) it allows five days for slippage while remaining within the extended constitutional deadline. (Note: In prior conversations Jagdeo has admitted his great concern that an election delay will tarnish his reputation on the international stage.)

[1](#)3. (C) For the ruling People's Progressive Party (PPP), August 28 is also extremely convenient because it allows them to strike quickly before other parties have much chance to campaign and gain momentum. The PPP is prepared to risk pushing GECOM staff into the election faster than they would like. Tellingly, GECOM's Chairman hinted to donors at July 12 meeting that he is aware of Jagdeo's preferred timing and "things are gelling" to make that possible. However, it would be premature to say the process is going full steam ahead -- a few hazards remain. For example, a number of

legal questions about the voters list remain unresolved (ref B). The courts have been reluctant to deal with these lawsuits so far; but GECOM's Chairman has stated publicly that he will abide by any court decision, even if it means delaying elections. Also, those who buy into the hard-line rhetoric of the PNC/R and WPA opposition parties could take to the streets in a bid to postpone elections. (Note: Speaker of the National Assembly told Ambassador there is well-established case law that suits of the sort filed by the PNC can only be filed and heard as Election Petitions after the election, not as law suits before the elections. Thus the current suits should be dismissed.)

¶4. (C) Jagdeo's predicted timeline for an August 28 Election Day:

- July 20: Statutory period for displaying the Revised List of Electors ends.
- o/a July 21: GECOM notifies Jagdeo that the Official List of Electors (OLE, the final voters list) is printed and ready.
- July 24/25: Jagdeo immediately announces Nomination Day of July 27 and Election Day of August 28.
- July 27: Nomination Day, deadline for parties to submit lists of candidates. This kicks off the 32-day statutory campaign period and the real election countdown.
- August 28: Election Day
- September 2: Constitutional deadline for the newly elected Parliament to meet (ref C).

August 28 Date Ratchets Up Urgency of Election Observers

¶5. (C) This latest election plan leaves very little time for international observer missions to get organized. Currently, only two OAS and one Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) long-term election observers are in Guyana. Short-term OAS and ComSec missions are expected to follow, but the August 28 Election Day catches the observers by surprise. There were over 200 international observers for the last election in ¶2001. The same number, at an absolute minimum, will be required this time. There will be nearly 2,000 polling stations. The credibility of the election will hinge largely on the effective monitoring of polling stations susceptible to fraud (i.e., in mono-ethnic communities). For the observation missions to run smoothly, it is critical that capitals act quickly on requests for resources.

Comment: Where does August 28 put us?

¶6. (C) No one has spoken seriously about an August Election Day for over three months. But the view among Guyana's political circles is now tilting towards a consensus that elections will indeed go ahead by the end of August. From the perspective of the U.S. and other donors, whether Election Day is August 28 or later is irrelevant -- as long as the date allows enough time for GECOM to be fully prepared to run an election up to international standards. Meeting this new deadline seems possible, but very tight. The donors' other, more elusive, objective is for all parties to participate in the elections and accept the results. Unfortunately, the stubborn opposition will likely discredit the results and tacitly condone election-related turmoil regardless of timing. END COMMENT.

BULLEN